

As Veteran Suicides Skyrocket, VA REFUSES To Spend Money To Save Them - The Ring of Fire Network; MEANWHILE 307,000 DIE WAITING FOR VA HELP.

Farron Cousins

4-5 minutes

A new report details two shocking pieces of information. The first is that the number of veterans in the United States committing suicide is [growing at an alarming rate](#). The second is that the VA has allocated millions of dollars that is supposed to be spent on outreach to prevent suicides, yet that money just sat there unspent. Ring of Fire's [Farron Cousins](#) discusses this issue.

Transcript:

*This transcript was generated by a third-party transcription software company, so please excuse any typos.

Right now in the United States, we have an epidemic of veterans committing suicide on average more than 20 veterans. Every single day in this country are committing suicide, and if that is not shocking enough than listen to this, the VA, the Department of Veterans Affairs has millions of dollars set aside for outreach. That outreach is supposed to be used on public service announcements, telling these veterans that there is a place to go there or people to call. We are here to help you. Please give us a call. Please contact us, reach out, let us help you before you do something drastic and irreversible. Since Trump took office, all of those millions of dollars to be spent on outreach have remained on spent. Those public service announcement, those PSAs, they stopped running. They don't do that anymore, and because of that in the last two years, the rate of veterans committing suicide in the United States has increased.

This is on them. This is 100 percent on the Trump administration and the department of Veterans Affairs. They have money that is set aside to help these people to get them the help that they need to sit and talk to them on the phone if that's what it takes, and they simply decided we're not going to do that. So again, that money is sitting in an account. Remarkably, they haven't just reallocated it and put it somewhere else and wasted it. It's just sitting there. This PSA is if disappeared from the airwaves, you know, posters, advertisements telling veterans that there is a place to go, there's somebody willing to help you gone and this was the decision that was made by this administration, so it's really difficult to not pin this on them because the increase in suicide deaths among veterans directly corresponds to the decrease in outreach by the Department of Veterans Affairs.

There is a direct correlation. In fact, it's pretty easy to say at this point, there is a direct causation when these people, whether it's a veteran or anyone else, when they feel like they do not have anyone out there that nobody cares, nobody is there to listen. It doesn't matter if they live or die. That's when they make these horrid decisions. Sometimes all it takes is one person. All it takes is a five minute conversation sometimes to pull somebody back from the brink. Sometimes it takes longer than that. Sometimes it takes lots of conversations, but whatever it is, we used to do that as a country and it was helping the problem, but we've stopped and I know this has Christmas Day and this is probably the last thing anybody wants to think about, but let me tell you, this is probably the first thing you need to think about, especially on a day like today. There are people in this country that desperately need help. They need somebody to talk to. They need somebody to listen. We used to provide that for them, but for some reason the Trump administration decided to turn their backs on these people and that's why we're seeing these suicide rates go through the roof.

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militarytimes.com

Veterans' suicides prove VA must improve services, mothers testify

By Patricia Kime Nov 19, 2014

5-6 minutes

The mother of an Army National Guard soldier who killed himself less than seven weeks ago pleaded with Congress on Wednesday to do more to save troops and veterans suffering from combat-related mental health conditions.

Valerie Pallotta, whose son, Pfc. Joshua Pallotta, 25, died Sept. 23, tearfully described the challenges she and her husband faced when Joshua returned from Afghanistan with post-traumatic stress disorder

and the nightmare they've lived since police officers knocked on the door of their Vermont home at 3:37 a.m. to tell them Joshua was dead.

"Our minds are at the funeral home, crying on our son's body as it lays cold ... our minds are at the veterans cemetery in Randolph, Vermont, the place our son was laid to rest, a place we haven't been able to visit," Pallotta told Senate Veterans' Affairs Committee members.

Pallotta and Susan Selke, the mother of a former Marine who died by suicide in 2011, pressed committee members to support legislation designed to improve mental health services for veterans, at Veterans Affairs Department medical facilities as well as civilian practices, where many returning troops end up seeking medical care after leaving service.

Selke, whose son, Marine Corps veteran Clay Hunt, died at age 26, urged passage of a bill named for her child — legislation that would require VA and the Defense Department to submit to an independent review of their suicide prevention programs and create a program designed to attract psychiatrists to work at VA by paying back their student loans.

"Clay constantly voiced concerns about the care he was receiving, both in terms of the challenges he faced with scheduling appointments as well as the treatment he received for his post-traumatic stress which consisted primarily of medication," Selke said.

Joshua Pallotta served as a mortarman with the 3rd Battalion, 172nd Infantry of the 86th Infantry Brigade Combat Team. Assigned to an outpost in Afghanistan near the Pakistan border, the unit saw intense combat action.

A close friend was killed while standing next to Joshua, his mother said, and her son felt tremendous survivor's guilt.

He developed PTSD and struggled to reintegrate into civilian life, she said.

"His death certificate should have stated the cause of death as PTSD/TBI, not from a self-inflicted wound," Valerie Pallotta said.

Clay Hunt died after having actively sought treatment for combat-related depression and PTSD. Before his death, Hunt performed humanitarian work in Haiti after the 2010 earthquake and was a key member of a group of former military personnel who formed the disaster relief organization Team Rubicon.

Despite being seen at various VA facilities for his mental health issues, Hunt struggled. And in Houston, when he had trouble getting an appointment and a delay in getting the brand-name prescription he needed, he told his mother he wouldn't return. He died just two weeks after seeing a psychiatrist.

"Not one more veteran should have to go through what Clay went through with the VA after returning home from war," Selke said.

The House version of the Clay Hunt Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act also would require VA to submit to yearly evaluations of its suicide prevention program and establish peer support outreach for veterans.

The House version also would require DoD to establish a review process for troops who received unfavorable discharges possibly because of behavioral problems related to traumatic brain injury or PTSD.

VA officials told the committee that the number of patients seeking mental health treatment with the department rose by more than half a million veterans from 2006 to 2013.

In addition, the department has hired more mental health providers and currently has more than 21,000 on staff.

It has increased its resources for mental health, and is working to improve access to veterans who live more than 40 miles from a VA medical facility, under provisions required by a massive reform law passed earlier this year, according to Dr. Harold Kudler, chief mental health consultant for the Veterans Health Administration.

But the department needs to do more, he added. He noted that while suicide rates for middle-age veterans have stabilized in the past several years, rates have risen sharply for female veterans and young male veterans being treated by VA.

According to data provided by Sen. Patty Murray, D-Wash., the rate of suicides among veterans ages 18 to 27 receiving care at VA medical facilities is 79 per 100,000 person-years.

The rate across the active-duty military is 18.7 per 100,000.

"VA recognizes that even one veteran suicide is too many. We are committed to ensuring the safety of our veterans, especially when they are in crisis," Kudler said. "VA is committed to providing timely, high-quality care that our veterans earned and deserve and we continue to take every available action and create new opportunities to improve suicide prevention services."

Patricia Kime is a senior writer covering military and veterans health care, medicine and personnel issues.